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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000738

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SUBJECT: S/CRS DELEGATION FINDS FRENCH IN LISTENING MODE

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah B. Rosenblatt. Reassess 1.4b,d

1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: French interlocutors were in active listening mode during 24-25 January briefings by Acting Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) Marcia Wong and NSC Director for Stabilization Clint Williamson. Wong and Williamson invited feedback on the non-paper "Creating a Global Response Network for Stabilization and Reconstruction" which was distributed in meetings at the MFA with S/P A/S-Equivalent Philippe Carre, Acting AF A/S-Equivalent Elisabeth Barbier, and IO A/S-Equivalent Sylvie Bermann, and also to Secretariat General for National Defense (SGDN) Director Eric Lebedel and to High Representative for Security and Conflict Prevention Pierre-Andre Wiltzer. The proposal calls for closer international coordination on crisis prevention and response. The French lack of an S/CRS equivalent showed in discussions, with each interlocutor reacting according to his or her individual equities. Bermann sought a tie-in to the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Barbier lobbied for a Francophone test-case, such as the Central African Republic. Wiltzer sought affirmation for the efforts of his own small shop at interministerial coordination. Lebedel thought in terms of conflict prevention. And Carre and his PDAS focused on French efforts at delimitation of NATO doctrine. End Summary and Comment.

Building around the PBC?

2. (C) Sylvie Bermann, IO A/S-Equivalent, lauded the S/CRS initiative, observing that crisis response required more than military resources and governments should reorganize to apply appropriate civilian resources toward crisis prevention and response. Bermann noted her previous experience at the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) where the EU was tackling similar challenges to S/CRS. Perhaps, she mused, it would be easier for a young institution like the EU to stand up its effort than for larger and more deep-rooted government bureaucracies.

3. (C) Bermann asked how S/CRS would interact with the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). For example, would S/CRS participate directly in PBC deliberations in New York? Bermann saw establishment of the PBC as a crucial breakthrough in UN reform. There was a need to learn lessons from misfired stabilization efforts like in Haiti, she said. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Burundi represented an early success, however the international community should take care not to prematurely reduce its engagements. Some were advancing DRC as a possible test case for the PBC, however Bermann agreed with the view of French Permrep de La Sabliere that the DRC was too vast and complex a challenge for a first attempt.

4. (C) Bermann stated the French MFA was considering forming a kind of "Crisis Cell," loosely similar to S/CRS, which could include military and other agency detailees, to assist MFA regional offices in organizing their response. The MFA was also considering how better to coordinate support for the African Union, bolstering AU crisis management capacity and looking at other areas for assistance, such as the judiciary. Bermann remarked there was a lively internal debate on how best to disburse aid or channel assistance for crisis response, whether through multilateral organizations or bilaterally. She judged the latter approach less efficient, yet offering other unstated advantages. Decisions would be taken ad hoc, she suspected.

Central African Republic: A Lab in Waiting?

5. (C) Acting A/S-Equivalent for African Affairs Elisabeth Barbier acknowledged French MFA interest in developing capacities similar to the S/CRS initiative, yet she said the exigencies of day-to-day crisis management made it hard for policy-makers to step back and take a strategic overview. She saw the Central African Republic (CAR) as an example of a situation that would derive immediate benefit from internationally coordinated stabilization efforts in order to sustain its fragile emergence from prolonged crisis and its transition to democratic rule. The CAR was in a "grey zone,"

unable to attract donor support because it had not yet worked out agreements with Bretton Woods institutions. With peace dividends delayed, the pressures of near-term challenges, like payment of civil servant salaries, were accumulating. Barbier asked how the S/CRS initiative, and the goal of internationalizing a cooperative network, would complement the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

Aiming to mimic S/CRS (on a small scale)

16. (U) High Representative for Security and Conflict Prevention Pierre-Andre Wiltzer, who was Junior Minister for Cooperation and Development from 2002-2004, a position in which he was often the official French face to Africa, said his current duties entailed developing a recommendation for the establishment of a French-style S/CRS-type interministerial organism. Wiltzer said he currently oversaw a 5-person team, including two MFA detailees and 2 military officers. He described the RECAP initiative (Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capabilities) as a signature French contribution to our common stabilization efforts, akin to GPOI. France now sought to further energize RECAP by giving it an increasingly international cast, notably through EU participation, in support of the African Union Standby Force and regional African organizations.

17. (C) Wiltzer underscored the risk of relapse into violence for states emerging from conflict; Haiti and Liberia in the 1990s were egregious examples. He suggested the international community and international financial institutions (IFI) in particular, should revisit their approach to such states. A key mistake was to require full ownership of the post-conflict process on the part of such fragile states before the release of funding. All too often, the World Bank made available large credit lines that went untapped, however, for want of local projects to meet proper financing criteria. He suggested precedence should be given to security sector reform in future.

SGDN Focused on Prevention

18. (C) Eric Lebedel, Director of international and strategic affairs at the Secretariat General for National Defense (SGDN), observed that French thinking on stabilization, reconstruction and conflict prevention was still in its early stages. (Note: the SGDN is a small coordinating body under the Prime Minister's office tasked with covering sensitive security issues.) No specific French government body has been tasked along the lines of S/CRS, he noted, but the French approach will be based on pragmatism. Additionally, he stated that French thinking is much less ambitious than the U.S. approach, in part, due to limited French resources.

19. (C) Lebedel stated that the SGDN is studying how best to deal with conflict prevention, with the expectation that the MFA and MOD are working on the other aspects of reconstruction and stabilization. He said France is taking a coordinated approach by working with academia and the European Union. Wong described the U.S. framework for early warning and detection, including the National Intelligence Council's watch list of countries at risk of instability, and hopes for better interaction with the EU on early warning and crisis response. SGDN goals are modest, according to Lebedel. Building on lessons learned in handling the Balkans crisis of the 1990's, the SGDN aims to ensure that once a warning of a country in crisis is made, that all relevant French political actors are fully informed. Lebedel concluded with the observation that the question remains as to what the SGDN should seek to accomplish beyond providing an early warning service. In the meantime, as part of the SGDN's research into the issue, but without providing any details, Lebedel informed the U.S. delegation that France was looking to host a conference in May to share views on conflict prevention

Is Harsh Reality in Afghanistan Driving New Doctrine?

10. (C) MFA Director of Strategic Affairs, Philippe Carre, who was flanked by desk officers Alexis Morel and Xavier Chatel, commented that he was glad to hear about Department of Defense Directive 3000, and to hear that the USG viewed combat and stability operations as complementary, not contradictory, in nature. He said that the French recognized that the U.S. was trying to develop a comprehensive approach, elaborating that the French felt that the thrust of this approach was evident in how the U.S. envisioned NATO operations in Afghanistan after the failure of the lead-nation model. When representatives from S/CRS pointed out that S/CRS did not have primary responsibility for Iraq or Afghanistan Carre warned, "reality creates doctrine also."

Carre asked that S/CRS pay attention to how the Pentagon presents issues of reconstruction and stabilization in the context of NATO in Afghanistan, saying that U.S. actions on the ground are not necessarily "in synch" with what S/CRS presented. He conceded, however, that perhaps the French were only seeing "part of the picture."

11. (C) Carre said that the GoF had interpreted the U.S. perspective as an expansion from traditional military roles for the military; while there were "traces of intellectual debate about doctrine, U.S. ideas were still essentially being hatched in a military context." In contrast, Carre said the French were well aware of the limitations of their more financially constrained military and were therefore reluctant to create new functional demands for them. He lamented that the French military was overstretched overseas and that, while new missions always come up, "the old ones never seem to go away." Given these constraints, he said, coupled with political and public aversion to involving the military in conflict situations, the GoF would prefer to develop the capabilities of other actors, or "relays," such as the AU for conflict related activities. For natural disaster humanitarian action, however, he said there has been an increased counterpush to increase the military's capabilities to respond quickly.

12. (SBU) Carre added that he will be in Washington on February 7 to have meetings with EUR A/S Dan Fried and A/S for Defense for International Security Policy Peter Flory. He said that he would be happy to meet again with representatives from S/CRS while he is there.

MFA Sensitivities re Civilian/Military Relationship

13. (C) On January 25, Clint Williamson from the NSC called on Nicolas Niemtchinow, MFA DAS-equivalent director for NATO/ESDP issues, to follow up on the earlier discussions with Strategic Director Philippe Carre. Niemtchinow and NATO desk officer Xavier Chatel emphasized that France is keen to delineate military intervention from civilian reconstruction tasks. Additionally, France does not want to see civilian/humanitarian efforts under military leadership. These French redlines are driven, in part, by the French military's reluctance to get involved directly in civilian reconstruction, given existing resource demands on the military. That said, the French military would be interested in joint planning to ensure that civilians take over this function as quickly as possible following a conflict scenario.

14. (C) In terms of coordination of civilian/military relief efforts, the French would like to see the UN and relevant local authorities in the field take the lead. The French also noted that with respect to such planning at NATO, Pentagon thinking emphasizes the integration of civilians under a military chain of command. Williamson observed while much of this has fallen to the military by default for lack of civilian capability, the U.S. is committed to enhancing civilian planning and response capabilities. S/CRS is looking at many operational models to work hand in hand with the military and with international and multilateral partners. Niemtchinow agreed, but stated that given the financial constraints of European governments, they are not keen to spend military resources on civilian tasks. To illustrate further French concerns, Chatel pointed to NATO operations in Afghanistan. NATO has a legitimate responsibility to protect civilian workers, he stated, but it remains unclear whether NATO should have a role in generating police force contributions.

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Stapleton